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Title: The Internet addiction versus aggressive behaviour among the youth

Author: Teresa Borowska

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The Internet Addiction versus Aggressive Behaviour among the Youth

Abstract

The aim of the article is to address and to answer the question to what degree secondary school students are addicted to the Internet and whether this addiction is interrelated with the phenomenon of aggression among young people. The presented findings were obtained on the basis of Kimberly Young's Addiction Questionnaire and B. Urban's Aggressive Behaviour Chart revealing stunning results as in case of secondary school students (contrary to the younger pupils referred to and described in the literature) there are no direct or definite relations between the degree of the Internet addiction and aggressive behaviour manifested by them.

Keywords: *aggression and its types, the Internet, Internet addiction*

1. The Internet addiction: its essence, types, consequences

The contemporary researchers keep asking the question about reasons for aggressive behaviour among children and young people. They are searching for the answer on both genetic and environmental grounds. There is also a lot of research showing the connection between an increase in aggressive tendencies and contact with violence received through the mass media [R. Vasta, M. Haith & A. Miller, (1995), p. 506 and further].

In Poland, M. Braun-Gałkowska carried out research in a group of boys aged 12–15 which proved that the boys who played computer games at least 10 hours a week were more aggressive and it referred to their physical and verbal aggressive-

ness as well as their indirect aggressiveness, negativism, suspiciousness, sensitivity and irritability. They were characterized by higher emotional tension and lower sensitivity to good and evil. It can be concluded that children spending more time playing “aggressive” computer games are characterized by higher aggressiveness, whereas their moral sensitivity is lower. In the light of other research carried out among children it turns out that those often playing “aggressive” games are more emotionally tense, aggressive, vulgar, indifferent to good. Such games in which one destroys, kills, tortures are very dangerous and lead to antisocial behaviours, and sometimes even psychopathic ones. A lot of young computer players have lost such features as: sensitivity, patience, softness, care of other people, respect for life and death [M. Braun-Gałkowska, (1997), pp. 58–62].

Interestingly, the computer addiction, as well as the Internet one, is not described in the Diagnostic and Statistical Book of Mental Disorders DSM – IV, of The International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Health Problems ICD – 10, and the definition of “addiction” accepted by The World Health Organization refers only to alcohol and psychoactive drugs. However, some researchers claim that the definition may also be used to describe other addictions. If we understand “using the computer” as “taking drugs”, then the definition describes the discussed phenomenon accurately [A. Mardofel, Z. Iwanowski, & B. Chudzik, (2005), p. 35].

Being addicted is like imprisonment in the following scheme of thinking: there is a prevailing desire to do something, if an addicted person resists this desire or something gets in their way, anxiety and interest in this desire grow; satisfying the desire lowers this tension and erases the need; but soon it appears again [P. Robson, (1997), p. 163].

The above-mentioned definitions of the addiction have some common features. Each of them mentions increasing involvement which stands in the way of fulfilling the priorities of every human being's life, such as: family, work, rest [P. Robson, (1997), p. 164].

The Internet addiction does not have one official name. The following terms are quite often used: internetholism, Internet-dependency, cyber-addiction, net-dependency, netholism, Internet addiction, infoholism. However, “Internet addiction” [A. Mardofel, Z. Iwanowski & B. Chudzik, (2005), p. 35]. has the most universal character and that is why it is obligatorily used in this article.

In American articles one may come across the following terms: Internet Addiction Disorder, Internet Addiction Syndrome, Internet Abuse, Compulsive Internet Use, Pathological Internet Use [H. Ginowicz, (2003), p. 4]. In the following paper the addiction is defined as an inability to take control over impulses without using

psychoactive means, and its nature is similar to compulsive gambling [*Nadużywanie Internetu: przyczyny, objawy, konsekwencje*. (2002), p. 45].

C. Griffith defined the notion of technological addiction as an addiction to a behaviour based on interactions taking place not in contact with people. Expanding the definition, he introduces six main elements referring to the Internet addiction: domination, changes of mood, tolerance, symptoms of being rejected, conflicts, collapses [C. Guerreschi (2006), pp. 37–39].

In the recent years there has been a tendency to concentrate on two independent elements of the physical and psychological type of addiction.

We can talk about a physical addiction when, after stopping the dosed substance, typical reactions appear which are called the rejection syndrome. The phenomenon is characteristic of substances which slow down or weaken the functions of the brain. A mental addiction consists of: thinking about nothing but satisfying hunger and straightforward interpretation of signals [P. Robson, (1997), pp. 164–167].

Kimberly Young enumerated the following subtypes of the disorder:

- Addiction to virtual relationships, sometimes referred to as a cyber-relationship addiction. It is an addiction to the Internet social contacts, exaggerated involvement in relationships on the net (virtual). It has its representation in participation in chat lists, IRC, and contacts through e-mails. An addicted person makes contact only through the net, and has unsettled relationships of man-to-man contact while being off the net. Such people can “talk” for hours with other Internet users, but at the same time they have problems with personal contacts. Such people start to lose their non-verbal communication skills; they are unable to read information passed on at that level, or they misread it. People with this kind of disorder can be met mainly in such forms of contact which ensure synchronic communication.
- Cyber-sexual addiction – is mainly connected with watching films and photos containing erotic and pornographic materials or chatting on sex-focused forums. This disorder can be defined as a compulsive use of websites connected with sex and pornography. Quite often they are based on other disorders and sexual deviations, such as: pedophilia, voyeurism, zoophilia, extreme exhibitionism and others.
- Computer addiction – an addicted person does not have to be on the net in that case, it is enough if they spend their time at the computer. It is not really important for them what they are doing, if they are writing a very important composition or playing solitaire. The only thing that matters is the fact that the computer is on and they are right in front of it.

- Net compulsion is very similar to computer compulsion but it is connected with being on the Internet. Such people are logged in all the time and they keep watching what is happening on the Internet. It is their obsession to play on the net, take part in auctions, etc. This addiction combines all forms of IAD.
- Information overload – compulsive surfing the net or browsing data bases. It happens because of a rush of information, e.g. when one stays in too many chat rooms at the same time or takes part in too many discussion lists [H. Ginowicz, (2003), p. 18].

“A frequent use of the Internet begins to be accompanied by an increased feeling of loneliness and depressions. The paradox is that, as a matter of fact, the Internet is a social technology, which, as planned, was to improve and enrich social contact giving us a feeling that we are running a richer social life. (...) in extreme cases this time taker can prove to be a merciless robber. For some Internet users being on the net starts to resemble symptoms of a behaviour disorder, which seems to be similar to obsession. Such people can spend whole days on the net, not being able to go away from it, while their activity in real-life social relationships is deteriorating” [P. Wallace, (2005), pp. 225–226].

2. The results of empirical research

Some questions arise: Is there – if any, and what – a degree of addiction to the Internet among secondary school students? What do the students’ parents think about addictions? And the most important question : is the phenomenon of addiction in the researched material in any connection with the phenomenon of aggression? The author of the paper assumes that the degree of the Internet addiction among secondary school students is quite high, which is not understood by their parents, and what is more, it is closely connected with the aggression shown by them.

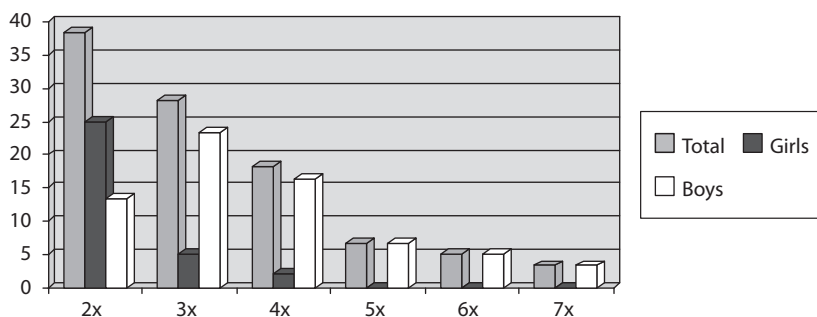
To verify the above hypotheses the author decided to use The Questionnaire of Internet Addiction prepared by Kimberly Young and The Observatory Aggressive Behaviour Paper by B. Urban to investigate 120 senior students of five grades in one of the secondary schools in a big agglomeration. The first tool contains eight questions referring to frequency, contents, amount of time spent on the net and various experiences and consequences which might affect the Internet user. Those who gave a positive answer to five or more questions are assumed to be addicted [H. Ginowicz, (2003), pp. 5–6]. The use of The Observatory Paper by B. Urban was

aimed at deciding which addicted students behave aggressively, and what types of aggressiveness they are and if they can be compared to the aggressiveness of non-addicted students. The Interview Questionnaire was used during the research into the parents of the two groups of the students.

It was intended to achieve knowledge about kinds of websites most often browsed by their children, time spent on it and their awareness of dangers brought by that medium.

The research results obtained in the group of young people after using Kimberly Young's Questionnaire of Internet Addiction is illustrated by Chart 1.

Chart 1. The number of "yes" answers in per cent of the whole 120 people group after using Kimberly Young's Questionnaire of Internet Addiction



The above chart shows clearly that the number of the people greatly addicted to the Internet amounts to only 3.3%. They gave their "yes" answers to 7 out of the 8 available questions. Those who answered "yes" to 6 questions (5% of the researched population) and 5 questions (6.7% of the students) can be considered addicted. The students who gave 4 positive answers (18.3% of the people) may be included in a group of risk. The remaining results are quite optimistic since 1/3 of the researched population (28.3%) chose 3 "yes" answers, and very optimistic as 38.4% of the students marked only two symptoms of the addiction.

The chart also shows that the boys are much more addicted than the girls because the latter slightly appear in 4 "yes" answers, and absolutely dominate among the non-addicted students.

And what do the students' parents think about the Internet addiction? The research shows that there is a clear difference between the parents of the addicted and non-addicted students.

And as for the time spent on the net, the first group were sure that their children did not spend much time at the computer (73.3%), 10% claimed that their children were in the virtual world for 2 hours a day, whereas 16.7% claimed that it took them 3 hours a day. At the same time, the parents of the non-addicted students revealed different data, of which 83.3% claimed that their children spent 3 hours a day on the net, 10% thought it took them up to 4 hours, and only 6.7% mentioned 2 hours a day. Differences between these two groups of parents appeared in the kind of knowledge they had about the information their children acquired from the net. The majority of the non-addicted students' parents said that the Internet was mainly used by their children to do their homework, whereas there were only 6.1% of such opinions among the addicted students' parents. The latter, in most cases, claimed that their children watched films or played computer games on the net. Playing computer games was also mentioned by 1/3 of the non-addicted students' parents, though at the same time they thought of it as the most important threat posed by the Internet. The most important threat for the non-addicted students' parents

Table 1. Extent and types of aggression among 120 students

Types of aggression	Number of students	%
Verbal aggression	44	36.6
Physical aggression	7	5.8
Translocated aggression	11	9.2
Lack of aggressive behaviour	58	48.4

turned out to be pornography – 88.9%, whereas only 10% of the addicted students' parents pointed this out as a threat, being more focused on the net game addiction – 73.7%. Let us have a look at the extent and especially types of aggression in both student groups researched. The results obtained using Urban's Observatory Paper are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that almost a half of the researched (58–48.4%) do not show aggressive behaviour. Most of the remaining students (44–36.6%) show verbal aggression.

Not many, 11 (9.2%), are characterized by translocated aggression, but 7 (5.8%) present physical aggression. The obtained results might make one wonder, now when we are facing the highly-publicized, especially in the media and in the literature as well, extent of aggression among young people. It is possible that its small extent results from the relatively small number of students researched (only 120 people) or it might have been caused by the fact that the exam was taken by secondary school students (not middle school students).

Knowing the picture of the addiction, and the changes and types of aggression in the researched group, it was attempted to establish if there was any connection

Table 2. Spearman's correlation of importance in the whole group researched (120 students)

Types of aggression vs. degree of addiction	Spearman' rank correlation factor	P – level of importance
translocated aggression & addiction	0.225258	0.083549
verbal aggression & addiction	0.155714	0.234816
physical aggression & addiction	0.248559	0.055493

between them. Table 2 presents the results of Spearman's correlation factor. It is worth adding that the correlations marked are at the level of $p < 0.5$.

As seen in the two cases (marked blue), the correlation is on the verge of importance, which means that the calculated "p" level is slightly higher than the standardized alpha level = 0.05 assumed in the analyses. It can be said that there is a slight positive correlation between dislocated aggression, addiction and physi-

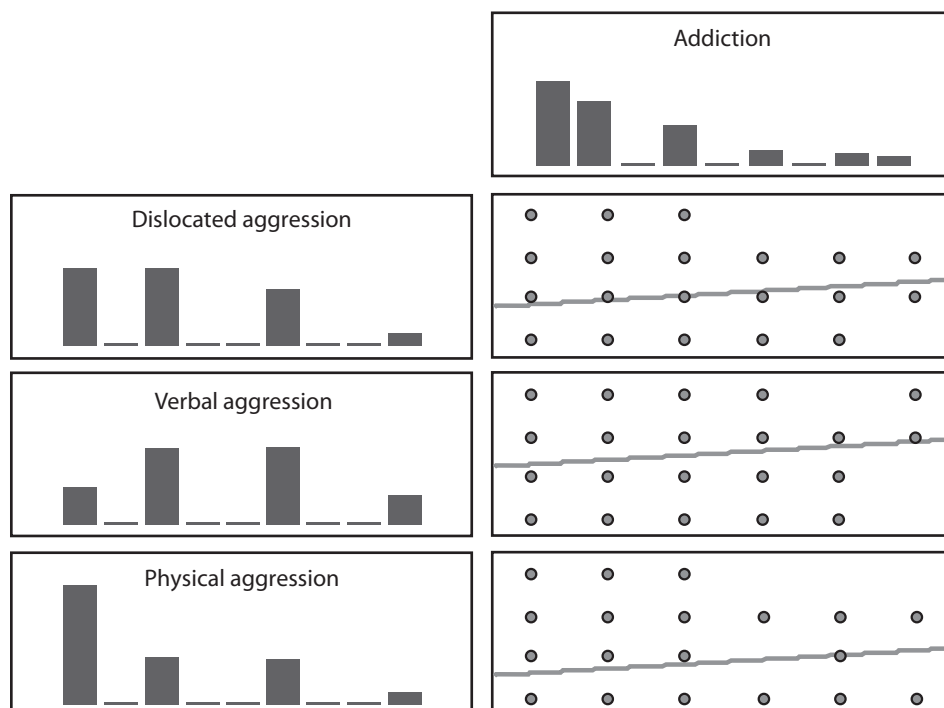
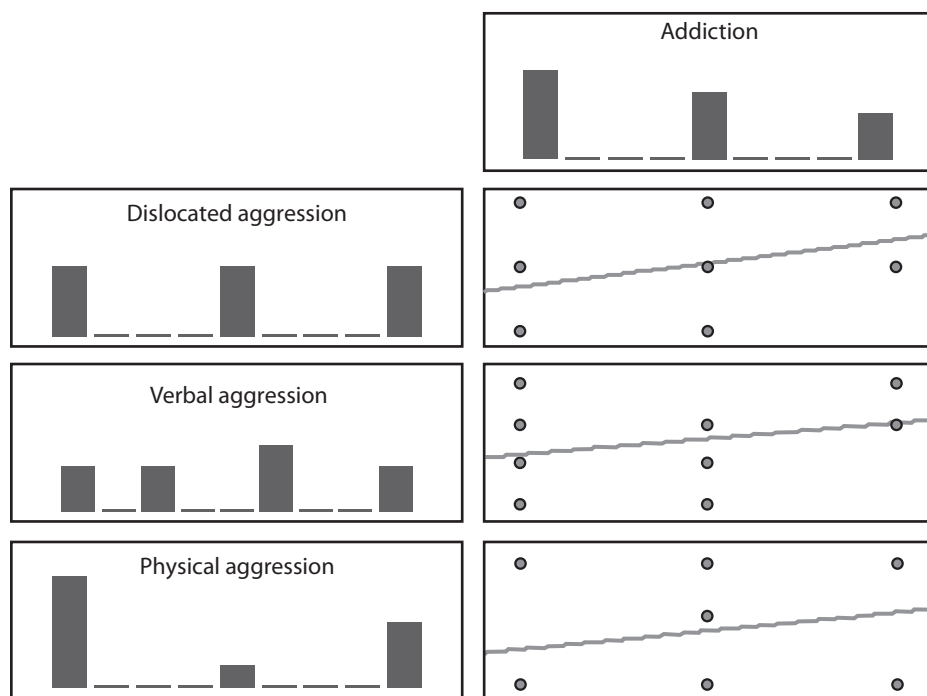
Figure. 2. The correlation between types of aggression and Internet addiction established in the whole (initial) group of students.

Table 3. Spearman's correlation of importance in the group of Internet addicted students

Types of aggression vs. degree of addiction	Spearman' rank correlation factor	P – level of importance
translocated aggression & addiction	0.338062	0.373569
verbal aggression & addiction	0.238693	0.536238
physical aggression and addiction	0.258966	0.501039

Figure 3. The correlation between types of aggression and Internet addiction established in the group of addicted students.

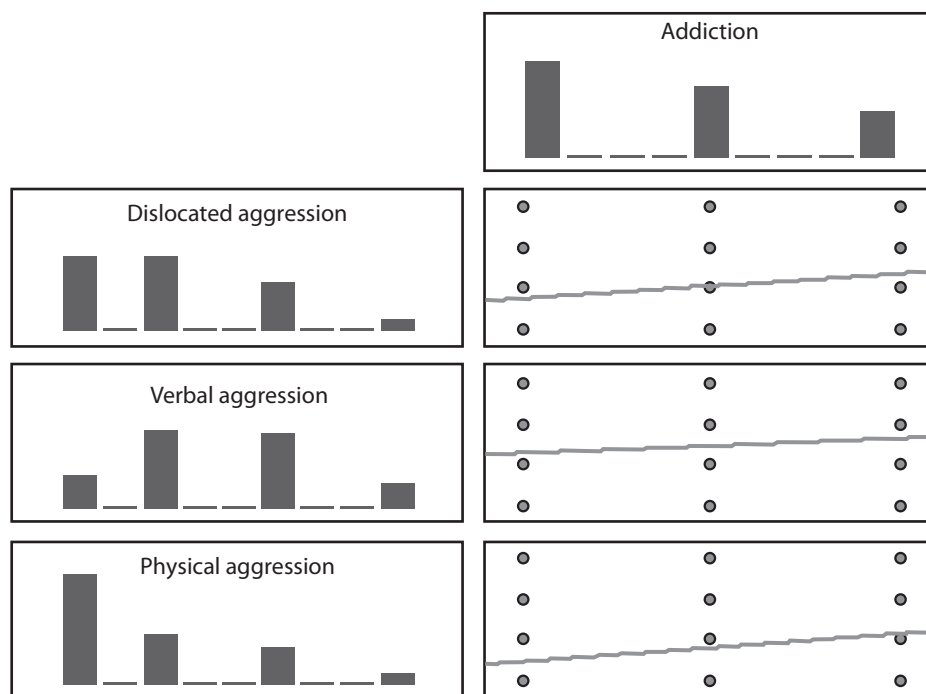


cal aggression, i.e. the higher aggression, the higher addiction. The correlation is shown in Figure 2.

Both Table 2 and Figure 2 refer to the initial group of 120 (students), which contained both the Internet addicted and non-addicted people. As can be seen, there is not a vital dependence between addiction to the medium and aggression shown by the students.

Table 4. Spearman's correlation of importance in the group of Internet non-addicted students

Types of aggression vs. degree of addiction	Spearman' rank correlation factor	P – level of importance
translocated aggression & addiction	0.297354	0.034084
verbal aggression & addiction	0.169549	0.234266
physical aggression & addiction	0.344791	0.013221

Figure 4. The correlation between types of aggression and Internet addiction symptoms established in the group of non-addicted students.

The connection discussed here will be clearer if we follow it separately in each group. And so, in the group of the Internet addicted students (7,6,5 or 4 positive marking), which is illustrated by Table 3 and corresponding Figure 3.

Both Figure 3 and especially Table 3 show a lack of vital relations between addiction and aggression.

The situation is a little bit different as far as the non-addicted students are concerned, which is shown in both Table 4 and the corresponding Figure.

As seen in the above Table, and Figure 4, there are important correlations in the non-addicted group of students between the dislocated aggression and physical aggression and scarce symptoms of addiction present among the students.

It proves that the higher levels of dislocated and physical aggression are, the more positive markings are (in Urban's Observatory Paper), the more symptoms proving addiction, which are enclosed in Kimberly Young' Questionnaire.

Summary

The following article has proved that it is possible to find in the literature some contents referring to the influence of the Internet on children's aggressive behaviour. However, the results obtained in the analyzed research into secondary school students have shown that there is a danger of the Internet addiction in this age group (aged 17–18), but the research results do not prove straightforward dependence between the addiction to this kind of medium and aggressive behaviour. Both the Internet addicts and non-addicted ones show examples of aggressive behaviour. It is worth adding that in the latter group (non-addicted students) there were found important correlations between dislocated and physical aggression and addiction symptoms. It is also interesting to look at varied opinions of the researched students' parents as for the time spent on the net (what is interesting the time was markedly lowered among the addicted students' parents), and kinds of information taken from that medium (the Internet addicted students' parents claimed that their children watched films or played computer games on the net, whereas the non-addicted students' parents claimed that their children treated the Internet mainly as some help to do their homework). Finally, it turned out that the two groups had a different approach to threats brought by the medium. The addicted students' parents claimed that the biggest threat was playing computer games, whereas the non-addicted students' parents claimed it was pornography.

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